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# Intelligence Report

*Le Duan and the Post - Ho Chi Minh Leadership*

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## LE DUAN AND THE POST - HO CHI MINH LEADERSHIP

### I. Principal Judgments

Le Duan, First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party, appears to be fairly secure in his position as "first among equals" in the collective leadership that runs North Vietnam. He faces some generally muted opposition, chiefly from the party's doctrinaire wing, but thus far has commanded enough support from colleagues to make his views prevail. The central issue for the leadership in Hanoi since 1954 has been and remains the question of how to "liberate" South Vietnam, and how much of the North's resources should be put into the effort. The Hanoi leaders have worked hard to achieve a take-over and have been reluctant, even since the cease-fire, to defer progress toward that aim. At the same time Le Duan, Premier Pham Van Dong, and some others are eager to push ahead with the job of rebuilding the North. Thus the leaders will be faced with a policy dilemma as long as the Communists remain so far short of their goals in the South.

Next to Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan apparently has had more influence than any other North Vietnamese leader in determining Hanoi's strategy toward the South since 1945. His strategic views have been relatively flexible. He has never been identified with a strategy of protracted guerrilla war (the strategy the Viet Minh followed against the French in the North), at least as a long-term policy. After the US entered the war in 1965, Le Duan generally advocated and supported large-unit, sustained offensive warfare in the belief that it could force a collapse of US and South Vietnamese resolve to keep fighting. Earlier, there had been periods (e.g., 1955-1957 and 1961-1962) when Le Duan seemed to share with Ho Chi Minh the belief that the North had nothing to gain by stepping up the war; at those times Le Duan supported a policy of refraining from major violence, while letting the political pot simmer.

The evidence since the cease-fire suggests that the Politburo under Le Duan's leadership is taking the second, "political" tack, at least for the time being. Hanoi is also maintaining major North Vietnamese forces in the South

*\*This report was prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence. Analysts of several other offices in CIA have been consulted, and they are in general agreement with its judgments. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the report's author, [REDACTED] extension 6068.*

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capable not only of defending Communist-held territory (their immediate mission), but also of mounting a strong offensive should the Politburo decide that it could force the South Vietnamese into a weakened negotiating position. The currently somewhat ambivalent policy is apparently the best mix the Politburo can agree on to preserve some military options in the South while improving opportunities for pushing postwar construction in the North.

### **A Record of Unity, Despite Internal Differences**

The record of stability in the Vietnamese Communist leadership is unmatched by that of any other ruling Communist party. There has never been an open power struggle or an extensive purge in the top leadership. The men at the top have been waging war most of the time since 1941, and have tended to submerge differences for this reason. A more important unifying force has been the skillful leadership provided first by Ho Chi Minh and then by Le Duan. The hallmark of their leadership style has been a willingness to tolerate differences in the Politburo, combined with an ability to keep dissenters in line.

Differences have existed among Politburo members over both domestic and war policy. There have usually been some leaders who have regarded specific decisions as too aggressive and others who believed they were not aggressive enough. Such differences apparently persist despite efforts by Le Duan to broaden the base of agreement. In 1972 and 1973, for example, Le Duan reportedly had only a majority of Politburo members with him in his decisions to launch the Easter 1972 offensive and then, again, to make concessions to reach agreement at Paris in January 1973.

Le Duan's chief rival over the years has been Truong Chinh, who was party secretary-general from 1941 until 1956, when he was demoted for errors in domestic policy. Under Truong Chinh the party had operated in consonance with Chinese precepts in both domestic affairs and war strategy. In 1957, Le Duan was brought to Hanoi to replace Chinh. The Southern-oriented policy he began to develop owed little in the way it was applied to either the Soviet Union or China.

Since then, Le Duan has gathered around him a group of men who had worked under him in South Vietnam while other leaders were fighting the French in the North. Among them are Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's highly competent negotiator and chief of the party's powerful Organization Department, and Pham Hung, who heads COSVN. There are indications that Chief of Staff Van Tien Dung has been particularly close to Le Duan and shares some of his views. If Le Duan were able to form a new Politburo in the near

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future, e.g., at the long-rumored 4th Party Congress, these men might well be key figures.

### Le Duan's Strengths and Weaknesses

Le Duan has several things going for him:

- More than any other leader, he had Ho Chi Minh's trust and backing. It was Ho who in 1960 conferred on Le Duan the title "First Secretary"—the title then held by the head of the CPSU and that of nearly every other ruling Communist party except China.
- Le Duan's long tenure at or near the top (since 1937) gives him prestige and authority. He made good use of the years he served as party boss under Ho to put his men in key spots.
- Although lacking Ho's charisma, Duan has solid qualities of intellect and leadership that seem to command respect and loyalty in the VWP apparatus.
- He has never been tainted by association with an officially discredited policy nor did he ever publicly incur Ho's displeasure, as did Truong Chinh, Premier Dong, and General Giap at one time or another.
- Le Duan is an astute political maneuverer who has acquired enough proteges and allies in the power structure to give him majority support. He has edged his old opponent Truong Chinh into an isolated position that provides little opportunity to challenge him effectively.

Nevertheless, Le Duan's failure to restructure the Politburo suggests that the potential for opposition to his policies, if not to himself, remains strong. The present Central Committee and Politburo were both created by Ho Chi Minh at the last party congress in 1960, and changes seem overdue. The failure to hold the long-delayed 4th Party Congress now that the cease-fire has reduced hostilities in the South is reminiscent of delays often seen in Chinese affairs which have usually masked an unresolved power struggle. As long as solid progress is not apparent in the reconstruction of the North and the revolution in the South, the opposition could coalesce against Le Duan. This will become increasingly likely if the regime is unable in another year or so to show reasonable progress toward its goals in the South or should it decide to put the main emphasis on development in the North and fail to make some solid economic progress there.

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## II. Unity, Differences, and Groupings

The leadership in North Vietnam is remarkable for its cohesiveness and for the determination with which it has pursued its nationalist and Marxist goals. The senior members of the Politburo of the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) all began their revolutionary careers in the 1920s, rose to prominence in the Stalinist Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in the 1930s, and have worked as a leadership team for about three decades. The fact that they have been fighting wars most of the time since 1941 has been a unifying force. More important has been the skillful leadership provided first by President Ho Chi Minh until his death in 1969, and then by Party First Secretary Le Duan. The hallmark of their style of leadership—unusual among ruling Communist countries—has been a willingness to tolerate dissent among colleagues, combined with the ability to reconcile differences.

The smoothness of Politburo teamwork has been marred occasionally by personal antagonisms and sharp behind-the-scenes disputes. These have sometimes led to shifts in relative positions within the power structure. But there has never been an open power struggle among the men at the top, a purge reaching into their group, or a major defection (like Trotsky and Chang Kuo-t'ao). This Vietnamese record of stability and continuity is unmatched by any other Communist state.

The party leaders are clearly tough-minded people; they have had their differences, but they have also demonstrated that they are able to submerge or resolve their disagreements and to work together once a decision is reached. Differences stem from several causes. There is diversity in temperament, background, and experience. Some individuals have at times been more receptive than others to Soviet or Chinese influence. Some, often the same individuals, have been associated with mistakes in domestic policy or have opposed key war decisions.

In the past, diversity was encouraged by Ho Chi Minh's unusual style of leadership. He seems to have tolerated a spectrum of views in the Politburo, while generally taking a central position himself. Thus during the Vietnam war some leaders usually regarded particular decisions as too aggressive, while others believed they were not aggressive enough.

Le Duan apparently is continuing Ho's practice of keeping around him men who do not always see eye-to-eye. It is doubtful, though, that Le Duan is pleased at having potential rivals on the Politburo. Perhaps, lacking Ho's great personal authority, he acquiesces in their presence on the Politburo for reasons of prudence or because he really has no choice. Whatever the reason,

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differences persist under Le Duan and are not always welcome. In late May 1972, for example, the party journal *Hoc Tap* complained of "rightist and leftist tendencies" in the party. This was possibly a reference to reservations of some of the leaders about the wisdom of the 1972 offensive, especially in view of the strong US retaliation that resulted. The decision to launch the Easter 1972 offensive reportedly did not have the unanimous support of the Politburo, only the "majority."

It has never been easy to identify with certainty the individual members of groupings within the Politburo, but it was not quite so difficult when Ho Chi Minh was alive. He allowed considerable information about factional views to circulate within the party, chiefly through political lectures and dissemination of political indoctrination material. Much of this type of information ultimately leaked out through captured documents, prisoner interrogations, and agent and other intelligence reports. Such reports have been rare since Ho's death. Their near-disappearance suggests either that Le Duan has clamped down on circulation of dissenting views within the party or that, with the passage of time, groupings have become less distinct and contentious.

The views of leaders on war policy have shifted over the decades. In the early years of the war, when the leadership as a whole was deciding to escalate the war, General Giap and, to a lesser degree, Premier Pham Van Dong apparently tended to urge caution and were more ready than others to make concessions to negotiate an end to the war. Their counsel resembled the advice Hanoi got from Moscow throughout the war, and they were labeled by their more militant adversaries in inner party circles as "pro-Soviet" and "revisionist." In 1967, when Hanoi's war strategy changed to the launching of big offensives (either to win a quick victory or to gain a strong position to negotiate), both Giap and Dong apparently became strong team players again. Giap almost certainly played a major part in the military planning of the Tet 1968 and Easter 1972 offensives.

At the other extreme, early in the war, was a group of men who opposed any concessions and advocated instead a classic "people's war" that would continue until a complete military victory was achieved. This was what the Chinese Communists were advising too until 1971, and it seemed to be a view widely held (and probably still held) in the army and in the southern apparatus. The most vociferous advocate of this position in the Politburo was COSVN chief General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who died, reputedly in an air raid, in July 1967. His chief backer (besides Ho Chi Minh) was the then number-three man, Truong Chinh, who had been party secretary-general from 1941 to 1956. In that era Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communists accepted Chinese political and ideological guidance more or less



## VIETNAMESE WORKERS' PARTY

### Politburo



Le Duan



Truong Chinh



Pham Van Dong



Pham Hung



Vo Nguyen Giap



Le Duc Tho



Nguyen Duy Trinh



Le Thanh Nghi



Hoang Van Hoan



Tran Quoc Hoan



Van Tien Dung

### Secretariat

#### First Secretary

Le Duan

#### Members

Pham Hung  
Le Duc Tho  
Le Van Luong  
To Huu

Hoang Anh  
Nguyen Van Tran  
Nguyen Con  
Xuan Thuy

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uncritically and with great enthusiasm. Their illusions came to an end, however, in 1956 when a land reform program conducted along lines specifically recommended by Mao Tse-tung had disastrous results. The failure of the program also led to the downgrading of Truong Chinh, although Chinh later made a partial comeback.

The year 1957 was a watershed for Hanoi. A sobered Ho Chi Minh, by now determined to pursue an independent Vietnamese course in domestic affairs and also impatient to take over South Vietnam, brought Le Duan, the Communist Party boss in the South, to Hanoi to replace Truong Chinh. Le Duan was given the job of reorienting the party toward a southern-directed policy, which was independent of both the Soviet Union and China. Over the next few years a third grouping coalesced under Le Duan, and this is the dominant group today. Besides Le Duan, it includes party organization boss Le Duc Tho and COSVN chief Pham Hung. The background of these three differs significantly from other senior members of the Politburo. They were in jail in Indochina during World War II and thus did not participate in the building of the Viet Minh organization. After 1945, they all stayed in the South to work in the underground. Le Duan and Le Duc Tho remained there until 1957. Pham Hung returned to the North in 1955, but was not placed on the Politburo until 1957. Thus none was serving in the center of power during the many years the Vietnamese were particularly close to the Chinese Communists.

The record indicates that one additional member of the Politburo Chief of Staff Van Tien Dung has been close to Le Duan (he worked under Le Duan in the South in 1955-56) and shares some of his views. Like Tho and Hung, Van Tien Dung was not at the center of power until after 1956. Dung was only a lowly divisional commander during the war against the French and was not even at Dien Bien Phu. Despite his inexperience and youth (he was 37), he was promoted to chief of staff in mid-1954, displacing a favorite of Giap's (Hoang Van Thai, who became Deputy Chief of Staff), and was immediately transferred South. Several prisoners have stated that Ho Chi Minh in his last years held Dung in higher esteem than Giap because of Dung's consistently aggressive stand.

Other members of the Politburo are specialists who exercise varying degrees of influence. In order of precedence, they are Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, a political light-weight; economic specialist Le Thanh Nghi, a loyal Le Duan man; the aging specialist on China and an associate of Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Hoan; and Security Minister Tran Quoc Hoan, the only one of the four who appears to have a strong power base of his own. Tran Quoc Hoan is a shadowy figure not aligned with any faction. He has held his sensitive post since 1953, well before Le Duan's rise, and there are tenuous signs that the relationship between the two is an uneasy one.

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### III. Le Duan's Policy Record

For many years the DRV has been generally consistent in its broad policy directions. Apparently Le Duan saw eye to eye with Ho Chi Minh on most issues, and thus felt no reason to institute fundamental changes after Ho's death. Le Duan, unlike Khrushchev under Stalin, was more than just an executive officer carrying out Ho's orders; he was a junior partner, helping form policy. The main elements of Le Duan's policies are:

- In foreign affairs, he has continued the policy started by Ho of pursuing a line independent of Moscow and Peking, while, so far as possible, maintaining good relations with both. The Sino-Soviet doctrinal split on war issues that existed from 1957 to 1971 enabled the Vietnamese to play one ally against the other and ensure continuing support from both. Hanoi has not been able to do this as effectively in the current era of Soviet and Chinese detente with the US, but it still maintains its independence of the two big Communist powers.

- His policy toward the South has been innovative and flexible. Military strategy has sometimes been daring and sometimes cautious, and the mix of political and military measures employed in each phase of the war has varied. Le Duan, with Ho Chi Minh's approval while he lived, apparently has had a dominant role in determining most strategy shifts. Virtually all the recurrent changes—from the 1954 Geneva agreement to the 1973 cease-fire agreement—met with opposition from groups believing that the decision was either too militant or not militant enough. Le Duan, and Ho Chi Minh before him, dealt skillfully with dissenters to induce them to submerge their differences. They also showed considerable talent for dealing with conflicting demands of their big allies.

- In the domestic field, Le Duan's prime objective is to build a modern, industrialized state as rapidly as possible, and to do so in an efficient way unencumbered by excess ideological baggage. He has opposed efforts to restrict "capitalist tendencies" if this hurts the economy, and he believes that "revolutionary enthusiasm" and experience in guerrilla warfare are a poor substitute for managerial and technical expertise. He is sometimes pragmatic to the point of being non-Marxist. More doctrinaire leaders, whose most vocal spokesman is Truong Chinh, have understandably taken exception to some of Duan's positions. Since 1960 policies generally have borne Le Duan's stamp, but the occasional appearance of mixed strands suggests a flexible amalgam of the two approaches. The doctrinaire wing of the VWP is strong enough to make its influence felt, particularly because the cease-fire has not ended

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fighting in the South. So long as that conflict continues, Le Duan probably will hesitate to make the policy shift he almost certainly would like to initiate - that is, to give the North top priority for attention and resources.

#### On Strategy Toward the South, 1945-1972

The Vietnamese Communists have paid due obeisance to Mao Tse-tung's precepts of guerrilla warfare. The precepts, which have been set out in textbooks by Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, in fact governed Viet Minh strategy against the French from 1946 to 1954. Le Duan, however, seems never to have been an unqualified admirer of either the Chinese Communists or their revolutionary doctrine. He has developed a complicated and flexible doctrine of his own that gives a place to classical rules of "people's war," but stresses the political and psychological effects of a given course of action. Thus, while the Communists have consistently emphasized political measures - including subversion and terrorism - in their struggle in the South, they have been far more willing to initiate heavy military action for its political impact than classical doctrine dictates. The aspect of "people's war" that has received short shrift is guerrilla warfare - a fact duly noted by proponents of classical strategy such as Truong Chinh, who reportedly criticized the offensive of Tet 1968 as a costly, "adventurous" act.

Some of Le Duan's views on strategy undoubtedly have their roots in the essentially political nature of his party experience from the 1930s through the 1950s. During those decades, Le Duan was engaged primarily in legal and clandestine political organization work, not in organizing forces for armed rebellion.

Between 1936 and 1939, for example, when the Communist parties of France and its colonies were permitted to operate legally and their leaders were given amnesty, the Indochina Communist Party was a tightly knit group of intellectuals - urban-based, bicultural, and responsive to the French Communist Party and the Stalin-controlled Comintern. In contrast, by 1935 Mao Tse-tung's Communist Party had left the coastal cities to organize peasants for armed revolt, in defiance of the Comintern. Le Duan held high positions in the ICP between 1936 and 1939; this was in fact the only period between 1931 and 1945 when he was not in a penal colony.

After 1945, during the war against the French, Le Duan served as secretary of the party's southern region, away from the main fighting in the North. Le Duan's area of responsibility simmered along at "stage one" of people's warfare - the stage of political preparation.

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After the French left in 1954, strong pressure built up in the southern branch of the VWP to expand guerrilla forces and to work to overthrow the Diem regime by violence. For several reasons, however, the VWP leadership in Hanoi ordered the Viet Cong to bide their time and restrict themselves to political activities: Hanoi was under pressure from both China and the USSR not to renew armed conflict; building the North had been given priority for resources; and it was felt that as a result of Diem's repressive policies and resultant unpopularity, time was on their side.

It was Le Duan's job to keep the lid on the restive southern apparatus, and this he did. Subsequently he justified his action in a widely circulated pamphlet issued late in 1956, *South Vietnam's Revolutionary Line*. In the pamphlet Le Duan said that the VWP fully supported the thesis of the 20th CPSU Congress (February 1956) on pursuing revolution through a "peaceful line." Le Duan specifically ruled out armed violence in South Vietnam, stating that "only" political action was permissible.

#### On Strategy Before the US Entered the War, 1958-1965

By 1958, however, the VWP Politburo, with Ho and Le Duan setting the line, began moving in the direction of a policy of more violent resistance to the Diem regime. Two developments brought about this change: the Diem regime, with US aid, was growing stronger, not weaker; and Hanoi was being pushed hard by one of its major allies, Peking, to pursue a militant anti-US policy.

Hanoi's shift was made slowly because of persistent opposition from Moscow and concern over provoking US intervention, and also because of what captured documents have referred to as "hesitancy" within the ranks of the Politburo itself.\*

Le Duan signaled the beginning of the shift early in 1958, when he made a series of speeches criticizing Soviet ideas on "peaceful" means of

*\*According to available evidence on the 1958-60 strategy arguments, General Giap and Premier Dong urged caution and delay in stepping up the conflict; at the other extreme, Truong Chinh and General Nguyen Chi Thanh, backed by Peking, argued that as long as it was being decided to fight a "people's war" they should go all-out and fight it in the way they had fought the French and the Chinese had fought their revolutionary wars. Ho and Le Duan opted for a third course, which in most respects was a compromise between two extremes.*

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acquiring political power. Reversing his 1956 position, Le Duan asserted that the Soviet theses did not apply to South Vietnam.

Captured documents and other evidence indicate that the Politburo spent the next two years working out the strategy for the southern struggle and the amount of support the North should contribute. What was finally agreed upon was a cautious mix of political action and "armed struggle" at the level of guerrilla warfare, backed by limited logistic and manpower support from the North. Le Duan spent most of these two years in the South preparing the apparatus for an intensified conflict. He evidently played a direct role in forming the South Vietnam National Liberation Front in December 1960; its manifesto incorporated verbatim whole passages from his September 1960 report to the Third Party Congress in Hanoi.

By the end of 1960, Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan apparently were satisfied that the insurgency in the South was on the right track and that they could safely turn their attention to economic development of the North. Over the next two years the Politburo held several plenums on North Vietnam's economy, and Le Duan spoke frequently on problems of industrialization, which seemed now to be his chief area of concern and interest. Relations with the USSR warmed, Truong Chinh stayed out of the limelight, and in March 1961, the hawkish General Nguyen Chi Thanh was quietly transferred to a position in rural affairs.

The lull in attention to the South ended in the spring of 1963, when the Politburo perceived that the Diem regime was on the verge of crumbling and decided that the time had come to make contingency plans for a military take-over. According to a captured document, Hanoi then reached the conclusion that it would have to send NVA forces South to ensure a decisive victory.

Le Duan once again signaled the change in a speech delivered in March 1963. The speech so closely followed the Chinese line on use of violence in revolutionary situations that it was broadcast by Radio Peking. As before, however, there was delay in acting. General Giap, backed this time by Khrushchev, argued that overt North Vietnamese intervention would invite US retaliation. (Khrushchev did, in fact, cut back Soviet military support in the spring of 1964.) General Nguyen Chi Thanh, back in Ho's good graces and now commander of all Communist forces in the South, believed with the Chinese that the North should quickly send enough of its own troops south so that ARVN could be defeated before the US had a chance to intervene effectively.

The final decision to send NVA forces South, made at the 9th Plenum in December 1963, mixed boldness with caution. Large-scale support—about

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six NVA infantry divisions—was planned, but the Politburo (including Le Duan, according to a captured document) did not believe that the US would introduce ground forces, and thus had no sense of urgency. NVA combat units were formed, trained, and dispatched South so deliberately and cautiously that they were not in position to fight until mid-1965. By then the US had entered the ground war, and the Communists had lost their chance for a quick victory.

#### On Strategy Against Combined US and GVN Forces, After 1965

Captured documents and public statements strongly suggest that Le Duan was the chief architect of North Vietnam's strategy in the next stage of the war. It was apparent to Le Duan that the war no longer could be won by military means alone. His idea, as reported in captured documents and prisoner testimony, was to fight hard for two or three years to soften up the US (particularly US public opinion) and then to negotiate a favorable settlement of the war from a position of military/psychological strength. Basically, it was the same strategy that had been used successfully against the French. Le Duan called it a strategy of "fighting and negotiating."

The strategy was immediately opposed by Peking and Moscow, for different reasons, and Le Duan took issue with both allies. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] he viewed the Chinese as extremists who wanted Hanoi to tie down US forces by dragging out the war indefinitely, and who dismissed any possibility of negotiations in the future. In a speech published in August 1966, Le Duan attacked basic Maoist principles of warfare, which had been spelled out—apparently largely for Vietnamese benefit—in an article by Lin Piao. Le Duan took two of Mao's points—fight defensively when the enemy is stronger, and do not risk losses by pitting weak units against strong—and turned them around. He asserted that the Vietnamese Communists were on the offensive and had been throughout the war, and had "invented" methods that enabled them, even with a weak force (a ratio of "one to 10, or more") to overpower a stronger enemy force. Le Duan was justifying two basic elements of his strategy: to maintain the option of negotiating, which can be done only from an offensive position; and to be prepared to strike military blows, even when one's forces are weaker, for psychological effect. The Tet 1968 offensive launched 19 months later was based on these premises.

Soviet advice to negotiate an end to the war immediately was rejected by Le Duan in 1966. He argued privately and publicly that the US was not yet as war-weary as the French were at the time of Dien Bien Phu. In a speech given at the 23rd CPSU Congress in Moscow in April 1966, he carefully pointed out that the time was not ripe for negotiations.

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According to a credible report [REDACTED] the Politburo met in the fall of 1966 and, over the objections of Truong Chinh and General Nguyen Chi Thanh, adopted a contingency plan for stepped-up military action that would lead to negotiations. The cadre said that Hanoi sought and readily obtained Moscow's support for the plan, but that Le Duan was unable to get Chinese approval. The Politburo went ahead with contingency planning despite the reported opposition of the Chinese. General Thanh's death, on July 7, 1967, may have removed one obstacle to the plan, for specific planning at COSVN headquarters for the Tet Offensive began soon after he died. The 1968 Tet offensive consisted of surprise attacks on nearly every city and military base in South Vietnam. Since in most battles the attacking forces were weaker than defending forces, no lasting military gains were possible. The boldness of the stroke, however, did lead to a dramatic rise in anti-war sentiment in the US, but not enough to force the US to withdraw on Hanoi's terms. So a second country-wide offensive was launched on May 5, 1968. Its failure and the failure of two subsequent country-wide offensives compelled the Politburo to abandon the Le Duan strategy in April 1969 and to retreat to the concept of "protracted war" that Truong Chinh and the Chinese had been advocating all along.

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The failures almost certainly eroded Le Duan's leadership authority for a while. According to prisoner [REDACTED] reports, many senior COSVN commanders were openly complaining as early as the summer of 1968 that the cost of the offensives was not worth the gains. (Le Duan reportedly visited COSVN headquarters in June 1968 to argue in person for continuation of his strategy.) The publication that September of a major speech by Truong Chinh criticizing the big-offensive strategy implied that the Politburo (and Ho Chi Minh) were dissatisfied with Le Duan's direction of the war.

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But after Ho Chi Minh's death in September 1969, Le Duan managed to reassert his authority. A major policy statement published in February 1970, and his subsequent war policies, demonstrated that his faith in the basic validity of his approach had not been shaken by the need to retreat in 1969.

In his 1970 article he again rejected Maoist military tactics and reiterated his concepts of strategy and war goals. For example:

- **Le Duan:** Our general theory of warfare is to maintain steady offensive pressure, with occasional leaps forward, even though the enemy is superior in troop strength and equipment. **Mao:** Fight the war in slow stages, and do not risk going on the strategic offensive until the military balance of forces has tipped in your favor.

- **Le Duan:** It is our strategy to attack the enemy on all fronts. **Mao:** Never disperse your forces. Concentrate superior forces for every battle and destroy enemy units one by one.



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- **Le Duan:** We attack the enemy anytime and anywhere, when he is weak and uncovered and even when he is strong and on guard. **Mao:** Strike the enemy only when he is weak and off guard.

- **Le Duan:** In a passage underlined for emphasis, Le Duan claimed that the Vietnamese have learned the military art of using a small force to fight a great force. **Mao:** In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (2,3,4, and sometimes even 5 or 6 times the enemy's strength.)

On negotiations, Le Duan was flexible. "To take advantage of the enemy's internal contradictions...our Party, on the basis of holding fast to principles, has flexibly and wisely employed various strategies." He cited approvingly past occasions when the party had made "principled compromises" in dealing with the French.

Le Duan's 1970 article laid the doctrinal basis for the 1972 Easter offensive and its aftermath, the January 1973 cease-fire. As of early 1974, it was Communist strategy to refrain from major military action, except to defend territory already under Communist control, and, instead, to turn to "political struggle." But GVN-controlled territory is fairly stable politically and also well-policed. With little opportunity for effective subversion a "political struggle" policy, in effect, means acquiescence of the status quo.

#### **Le Duan vs. Truong Chinh on Building the North**

Le Duan's views on domestic policy are shaped by his vision of creating a modern industrialized country in a brief period of time. In March 1973 he wrote that "the greatest scientific and technological revolution in mankind's history is now in full swing over the world," and expressed his determination to take full advantage of the opportunity to share in these benefits. He said, "We will not spare any effort or money in this field, which plays the most decisive role...in the present era."

Le Duan's pragmatic and energetic proposals for building a strong state are not always enthusiastically received by others in the leadership. Some fear that economic development may be achieved only at the expense of traditional Marxist goals and lead to a resurgence of "capitalist and bourgeois tendencies."

Debates on domestic policies, like those on war policies, have been sharp and polemical. The key issues in dispute show up most clearly when

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the writings of Le Duan and Truong Chinh, long the principal spokesman for the doctrinaire wing, are compared:\*

*\*Le Duan's economic and ideological views which have been consistent over time--have been set down at length in writings and speeches published since he became First Secretary in 1960. His views are comprehensively spelled out in three statements issued since 1968:*

- a speech given June 1968 in Nam Ha Province, published in the August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap*
- a "state of the nation" report in February 1970.*
- an article in the March 1973 Hoc Tap describing the kinds of cadres and party and government organizations needed in the "new era" of postwar construction.*

*Truong Chinh's ideological views are comprehensively stated in his 1968 speech, "Let Us Be Grateful to Karl Marx and Follow the Path Followed by Him." The speech was summarized in the same August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap that published Le Duan's Nam Ha speech. Chinh's speech, a long one, was broadcast in full on September 16-20, 1968, and apparently recirculated, at least to Party members, in 1970; as recently as August 1970 Party members were being instructed to study it.*

Le Duan

Truong Chinh

### **The Three Revolutions**

The "three revolutions"—"the revolution in production relations, the revolution in technology, and the revolution in ideology and culture"—is a slogan that has been popular in Vietnam since at least 1961. The slogan expresses, somewhat clumsily, the same idea embodied in the Chinese slogan "Red and expert."

It has been standard practice for Le Duan, especially since 1970, to word the slogan in a way that singled out technical expertise as the most important aspect. For example, he says that the only way to build socialism is by "successfully carrying out the three revolutions, of which the technical revolution is the key." (Le Duan's underlining) (1970).

The general line of building socialism in the North consists of "strengthening dictatorship toward the people's enemy, repressing counter-revolutionaries, maintaining security and order...and carrying out the following three revolutions: the revolution in production relations, technical revolution, and ideological and cultural revolution." In the ensuing discussion of the "three revolutions" Truong Chinh typically gives more extended treatment and emphasis to the third revolution, that of ideology and culture. (1968)

### **The Struggle Between the Capitalist and the Socialist Road**

The struggle between the two roads is primarily a problem of economic production. "Only" by expanding production through the three revolutions—of which the technical revolution is the main one—can the conditions that foster capitalism be eliminated. "Carrying out the three revolutions...represents the basic content of the class struggle." (1970)

"The struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road is still going on to determine definitely who will defeat whom.... This is a protracted, hard, and complicated struggle. Such movements as the movement to suppress counter-revolutionaries...are the content of this struggle." (1968)

### Lenin on "Building Socialism"

Praises Lenin for having boldly changed from a policy of war communism to the New Economic Policy in 1921. Lenin, he said, "had to exert immense effort to persuade communists who were imbued with revolutionary enthusiasm but unaware of economic laws" that "the New Economic Policy was not a policy of restoring capitalism but the only possible single policy for the USSR at that time." (1970) (similar reference to Lenin's NEP was made in 1968)

Quotes Lenin to the effect that the main task of a revolutionary regime *after* acquiring power is to prevent the resurgence of capitalism. (1968)

### On Cooperative Farming

Cautions that it is absolutely essential under present backward conditions to preserve the individual peasant economy, which provides peasants with 40 percent of their income, and is the system under which 5 million pigs are raised.

Twice Le Duan states that it is party policy not to do anything that "restricts" the sideline economic activities of peasants. Cadres should even help promote family farming by seeing that peasants get seed and tools, and should not find this a "frightening" trend. (1968)

Although it is very important to eliminate capitalist elements, this is not the crucial thing; it is imperative that labor and materials are "managed so as to expand production most rapidly." (1970)

"The idea that any method of production that increases the social product is acceptable is not the view of the working class and the Party.... We must produce in accordance with socialist collectivization." (speech published in January 29-30, 1969 *Nhan Dan*)

"The spontaneous capitalist character of small producers is appearing again and must be repressed." "The management of land under collective ownership has run into deviations and errors," and we must strengthen the collective economy in all possible ways. (1968)

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### On Repression

Old cadres, trained in revolutionary techniques, now often rely on coercive measures to get things done. "This is not right." (1970)

"Easing vigilance against...counter-revolutionary forces...represents a dangerous rightist error. However,...if we are only concerned with quelling (these forces) while losing sight of the essential task of...carrying out the three revolutions, we would commit a serious error." (1970)

It is "necessary to use violence against counter-revolutionaries and exploiters who refuse to submit to reform." We must strengthen "the repressive apparatus." (1968)

### On Revolutionary Enthusiasm

"Without revolutionary enthusiasm, there can be no revolutionary acts. But with only revolutionary enthusiasm, the most we can do is eliminate the old; we cannot build a new society." (1970)

"Revolutionary enthusiasm is very important. But if we think that we can build socialism with...our enthusiasm alone and if we disregard all objective laws and economic facts which are sometimes cruel and hard, we are grossly mistaken." (1970)

"The most zealous elements" make the best party members. (1968)

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### On Ideology

"But something which deserves our attention is that no small number of our cadre often merely emphasize ideological indoctrination and view that as the only and the best measure for resolving every problem. It is clear that this method of operation cannot meet the requirements of production." (1968)

"If we simply acquiesce to generalized ideological appeals...we will be unable to complete the great task of building socialism." (1968)

Cadres are already imbued with enough zeal and enthusiasm. The main danger now lies in the fact that "many" party officials, at all levels, "have substituted general ideological and political tasks...for the organizational task." (1970)

Formerly, the party relied heavily on propaganda to get things done, but now we should use modern methods of management. "However, most of our cadres do not yet know or are still unfamiliar with this fact." (1970)

It has "become a way of life" with some people to talk incessantly about ideology in a loose way that ignores practical organizational problems. "This is an inherent sickness found in the bourgeois intellectuals and old-fashioned Confucianist school teachers." [This could be a slap at Truong Chinh, who is the only senior Politburo member to have received a classical Chinese (i.e., Confucianist) education.] (1973)

The party must be built "both ideologically and organizationally." He stresses the importance of "heightening the political and ideological standards of cadres and party members and of enhancing their revolutionary virtues." "However, it is regrettable that up to now, for one or another reason, our tasks of theoretical and ideological struggle still have many shortcomings." The solution Truong Chinh recommends is to intensify ideological indoctrination "to guard against the influences of revisionism and dogmatism." (1968)

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### Criteria for Selecting Party Cadres

Previously, cadres had to know how to lead revolutionary struggles, how to operate clandestinely, how to lead guerrilla warfare. Today, in the era of construction, problems are different. Now, in order to lead economic development, party officials "must know how to manage the economy and must study science and technology." Today, criteria for judging performance are different: "We cannot recognize any party organization...as good, as long as its production is slow." (1968)

The old guard must be replaced by men who have the energy, health, know-how and managerial skills required in this "new era." Thus:

Experience acquired in decades of revolutionary party work is "valuable;...however, this definitely cannot compensate for what we need most badly—the ability to organize economic development." (1970)

The key party mission today is the "technical revolution," and this will be the "only" criterion by which party members are judged. (1973)

"We have often heard abstract and fuzzy talk about 'class stand and class ethics.'" There is no need to be unclear, because the issue is simple. In the past, one's class stand was manifested by revolutionary activities. Today, in the North, class stand is manifested mainly by efforts to create modern industry and agriculture. (1973)

"The task of party-building must be closely tied to mass revolutionary movements. New cadres must be selected on the basis of their revolutionary background.... On the one hand, look for the most zealous, most select elements of the working class and make them party members. On the other hand, draw into the party outstanding elements of the laboring masses who have emerged in the long and arduous struggle against imperialist aggressors.... Simultaneously with the admission of new party members, quickly expel from the party the provocateurs, the antiparty elements, the factionalists, and those who are politically backward, as well as those poorly qualified, party-wise." [Says nothing about technical or managerial expertise and experience] (1968)

#### IV. Le Duan's Position Since Ho Chi Minh's Death

Le Duan appears to have strengthened his political position considerably since Ho Chi Minh died in 1969. He was even then "first among equals"; now the gap has widened between him and his potential rivals on the Politburo. Le Duan's decisions do not always command unanimous support, but he seems strong enough to make his views prevail. There is a similarity in the rise of Le Duan and that of Brezhnev in the Soviet Union. Neither is a figure who rules through the force of his personality, but both, after somewhat shaky starts, have gradually consolidated control so that they now effectively lead their respective Politburos.

For a few months after Ho's death in September 1969, it was unclear who was more powerful, Le Duan or his chief rival Truong Chinh. In fact, during that period VWP policy guidelines seemed to be inspired more by Truong Chinh's ideas than by Le Duan's. Truong Chinh set out his thoughts in a long speech in mid-1968 (the exact date was never clear) that was published in full in September. The speech was promptly hailed by Hanoi as "a new contribution to the treasury of theoretical works on the Vietnamese revolution," attesting to its authoritative character. It was a programmatic speech calling for greater commitment to ideological goals in the North, and in the South for a shift from the big offensives espoused by Le Duan to a more orthodox "protracted war." The speech is generally considered to have been the basis for the VWP decision in the spring of 1969 to reduce the level of fighting so as to test the new US administration and at the same time to get a breathing spell. This long-overdue retreat was almost certainly adopted with Le Duan's approval—in February 1970 he publicly endorsed the principle of sometimes shifting to the defensive to gain time. Nevertheless, it was Truong Chinh's name, not his, that was associated with originating the policy of retrenchment.

Uncertainty over Le Duan's status increased late in 1969 when, after delivering the funeral oration for Ho Chi Minh, he went into seclusion for five months, making only one routine public appearance in October. Truong Chinh, in contrast, remained publicly active, and made a few speeches on ideological issues. Understandably, Western observers began speculating that Truong Chinh was winning a power struggle.

That theory became untenable in February 1970 when Le Duan showed up to give an important speech on the occasion of the party's 40th



## LE DUAN

Le Duan, who was born on April 7, 1907 in Quang Tri Province, has been First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party since 1960, and in the top leadership since 1937, longer than anyone else in the Politburo. He was in a penal colony on Con Son Island from 1940 to 1945 and remained in the South after World War II to build a clandestine political apparatus. Ho Chi Minh summoned him North in 1957 to replace the just-demoted Truong Chinh as his second-in-command, and to prepare for a more violent conflict in the South.

Although he does not always get his way, Le Duan is clearly "first among equals" in a collegial leadership, having nailed down his claim to the number-one spot after a period of maneuvering that followed Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969. Le Duan has two major and often conflicting goals: to establish Communist control in the South, and to build a modern, industrialized state in the North. He is associated with the strategy of launching big offensives to achieve the first aim, but is notably pragmatic and flexible. Thus he is willing to consider less violent "political" and "diplomatic" approaches to the struggle in the South when the situation so indicates. Since the Paris accords were reached in January 1973, Le Duan has consistently talked about the "new era" of construction in the North, suggesting that for the time being he sees no choice but to keep military activity in the South at a low level and to concentrate on his second aim.



Le Duan (L) and Truong Chinh (R) with Ho Chi Minh at Third Party Congress (1960)

## TRUONG CHINH

Truong Chinh, who was born in the North in 1907, is formally ranked just after Le Duan in the Politburo. His position is, however, largely ceremonial; he probably holds little real political power. He is a leading figure in the DRV's rubber-stamp legislature and in the Vietnam Fatherland Front. Known as a Marxist theoretician, for many years (1941-1956) Truong Chinh was Secretary General—the most important man in the party after Ho Chi Minh.

After mismanaging domestic policy in 1956, he was replaced by Le Duan, and the two have been rivals ever since. They have differed over both how to fight the war and how to conduct domestic policy. In Truong Chinh's last major policy statement, a speech given in 1968, he criticized the big-offensive strategy. He has advocated fighting the war "to-the-end," guerrilla style; and, in the North, preserving ideological purity in domestic programs. Chinh apparently has been the spokesman for an influential doctrinaire wing of the party—an ill-defined group perhaps centered in the military and the Southern apparatus. Support from this group would explain why he retains his high Politburo rank.

anniversary and *Nhan Dan* published a long statement\* by him spelling out the party line on strategy and domestic policies. That article firmly established Le Duan's primacy. It was immediately given nearly the same authoritative standing as Ho Chi Minh's writings. A *Nhan Dan* editorial described the article as an important basic document that correctly set forth "the party's lines and policies," and all party cadres were instructed to study it. Its emphasis was on a flexible strategy toward the South and a pragmatic approach to economic development at home. In setting forth these broad new party guidelines, the article clearly was intended to put Le Duan's own stamp (and his gloss as well) on the strategy outlined in Truong Chinh's 1968 speech. As such, it was a vigorous assertion of Le Duan's leadership.

In subsequent months several leaders found occasion to affirm their loyalty to Le Duan. On May 3, 1970, Truong Chinh himself instructed 500 senior cadres attending a seminar held to study the February article to "unite around the Central Committee which is headed by Le Duan." Shortly after that, Foreign Minister and Politburo member Nguyen Duy Trinh privately told a visiting foreigner that Le Duan's stature was far above Truong Chinh's. The foreign minister was quoted as saying that Le Duan was popular and flexible, while Chinh was considered dogmatic and pro-Chinese. Premier Pham Van Dong in his annual National Day speech, given on August 31, 1970, quoted only Le Duan and Ho. Dong confirmed Le Duan's authority in the area of economic development—the main theme of the speech—by saying that "in his February article...Comrade Le Duan already made clear the party's line concerning...industrialization."

#### Le Duan Encounters Resistance, February to August 1970

Although Le Duan clearly had nailed down his claim to the number-one spot by February 1970, for several months expressions of support for Truong Chinh and some of his 1968 views indicated that Duan was still facing opposition powerful enough to introduce sour notes in the propaganda. The public discussion dealt only with domestic issues, but it seems likely that long-term strategy toward the South—the most crucial problem facing North Vietnam in the spring of 1970—was the chief issue.

*\*On February 14, 1970 the normally four-page Nhan Dan published an extraordinary 12-page edition devoted to Le Duan's article, entitled "Under the Glorious Party Banner, for Independence, Freedom, and Socialism, Let Us Advance New Victories."*

In mid-1968 a public debate had been conducted on domestic matters (and only on them) while the Politburo in fact was preoccupied with a heated argument over whether to continue the big offensives strategy.\* In brief, the evidence suggests that in mid-1968 Truong Chinh was calling for a return to the classic people's war doctrine, arguing that big offensives had proved "adventurous" and too costly. Le Duan defended the big-offensive strategy. With Ho Chi Minh mediating, it was apparently decided to launch two additional coordinated country-wide offensives (August-September 1968 and March 1969). In April 1969, after these offensives also had failed to achieve satisfactory gains, the Politburo adopted the Truong Chinh line.

The classic strategy to which Communist forces then returned was the cautious and defensive stance that people's war doctrine prescribes for combat with a militarily superior enemy. It was essentially designed to conserve manpower so that the Communists could, if necessary, fight for a long time. The Politburo was still committed to this course in the spring of 1970, when Le Duan again asserted his primacy. In his February 1970 article, Le Duan approved the retrenchment strategy—as a temporary expedient. He urged that Hanoi retain its flexibility and be ready to seize promising opportunities of any kind: either to resume the offensive, or to make "principled compromises" with the enemy under certain circumstances.

At that point, the Politburo seems to have been wary of giving Le Duan the authority to move in one of these directions. On the one hand, it had had enough of "adventurous" offensives for the time being, but on the other, it probably saw no advantage in making concessions. Without Ho Chi Minh around to mediate, it was not surprising that Le Duan apparently had trouble selling his strategic views.

Whatever the issue, he was certainly having trouble convincing his colleagues to accept his recommendations. His own February article acknowledged the existence of "differences in view" in the collective leadership, and said that "some comrades must learn to make concessions." It is significant that the Hanoi leadership as a collective body withheld public affirmation for Le Duan's program through most of 1970. During that

*\*The August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap published a speech on domestic problems by Le Duan—his only major public statement of the year—which soundly criticized the doctrinaire stand being taken by Truong Chinh on such issues as qualification of party members and farm cooperativization.*

period, the program was not endorsed in part or in whole by a Central Committee communique, Politburo resolution, or Secretariat directive.

Not only did Le Duan fail to get a clear endorsement from his peers, but two Politburo resolutions issued in March and one in August actually ran against the grain of his February article. In March, the Politburo issued resolutions on improving the quality of party members and on strengthening cooperative management of farms. In their emphasis on ideological purity, both echoed Truong Chinh's 1968 speech, and both conspicuously failed to pick up Le Duan's standard emphasis on practical results and on the importance of technical expertise over ideological purity.

Treatment of this so-called "Red and expert" issue became a measure of support for Le Duan's position. With typical pragmatism, Le Duan has generally treated technical expertise as more important than ideology, but his February 1970 article was exceptionally categorical. It stated flatly that of the three revolutions (the revolution in production relations, the revolution in technology, and the revolution in ideology and culture), "the technological revolution is the main one." The slogan, which appeared repeatedly in his article in this form and was even underlined several times for emphasis, thereafter appeared routinely in articles and editorials in the party press. The two Politburo resolutions of March 1970, however, withheld endorsement of Le Duan's formula, by mentioning merely "the three revolutions" without indicating that one aspect had priority over another.

Le Duan apparently was running into substantial opposition in August 1970, when a Politburo resolution came out instructing cadres to study both the 1968 Truong Chinh and the 1970 Le Duan statements. Party officials almost certainly interpreted this as a sign that pressure was being put on Le Duan to make concessions to those who shared Truong Chinh's more fundamentalist philosophy.

Another important clue that Truong Chinh's standing vis-a-vis Le Duan remained strong in that period surfaced in the treatment given the two in

official histories published at the time.\* As in histories before Ho's death, both men continued to be given more or less equal attention in passages describing their roles in the party's early history. After August 1970, Truong Chinh's name rarely appeared in historical reviews and attention to Ho Chi Minh himself diminished, leaving Le Duan the paramount figure in early party history.

In sum, there were enough mixed signals in propaganda as of August 1970 to conclude that Le Duan's power position was less firm than he desired. Nothing in the propaganda indicated that his hold on the number-one spot in the VWP party structure was in doubt, but it appeared that he was having difficulty enlarging his authority and winning over colleagues to his policy viewpoints.

#### **Le Duan Acquires More Power and Silences the Opposition After August 1970**

A review of political events in the last third of 1970 suggests that late in the summer Le Duan did manage to strengthen his position. Probably the immediate pressing issue he was able to exploit was the mounting GVN/US military threat to Communist logistic bases in Laos. In any event, from the autumn of 1970 through the beginning of 1974, war strategy and policy pronouncements carried Le Duan's stamp and propaganda comments on him were more adulatory. Central Committee documents, instead of undercutting him, reinforced his authority. What political opposition persisted was not clearly defined.

Military developments in the late summer of 1970 were forcing the Politburo to make a major decision on how to respond to the threatened

*\*Three histories were published in 1970: a history of the party (January 1970), a new biography of Ho Chi Minh (May 1970), and "The August Revolution (1945)" (August 1970). The January history, the most comprehensive of the three, followed the traditional party line in presenting a fairly balanced treatment of Duan and Chinh. It noted that Le Duan rose to the standing committee of the ICP Central Committee in 1939, shortly before going to jail. Truong Chinh then became provisional secretary-general in 1940, helped build up the Viet Minh, and, with Ho, led the party to victory against the French. The January history, like previous ones, took a significant slap at Truong Chinh by referring to land reform errors in 1956.*

allied invasion of Laos. A few months earlier, allied forces had invaded all Communist bases in Cambodia, and Communist forces retreated in confusion. By late summer 1970, Hanoi realized from the logic of the situation (and probably from agent reports as well) that the allied command was planning to follow up with a massive invasion of Laos.

The Politburo had a choice to make. It could continue the strategy of "protracted war"—falling back when strongly attacked, encouraging the enemy to extend his lines of communication, and then moving to inflict heavy losses on him. After the enemy has withdrawn, friendly (Communist) forces would then rebuild their bases and resume the slow process of building up greater military strength, in preparation for an ultimate confrontation after the balance of forces had tipped in their favor. It was recognized that this process probably would take many years.

The strategy actually adopted was much more daring and aggressive. It was plainly devised by Le Duan, who once before (1966-1967) had shown little patience with "protracted war" doctrine as a long-term policy. In high-level debates, Le Duan argued successfully for adoption of the "fighting and negotiating" strategy that became firmly identified with his name. The crux of the strategy was to strike hard military blows so as to be in a position of strength during peace negotiations.

The final decision to launch another big military/psychological offensive in 1972 was probably reached at the 19th Central Committee Plenum\* convened about December 1970. The Hanoi leadership apparently decided to resist the coming allied invasion with all possible force (elements of 13 divisions were used) and, if all went well, to follow up with preparations to launch a large country-wide offensive of its own.

The allied operation, Lam Son 719, failed to achieve its objectives and was successfully thrown back in March 1971. On March 27, 1971, just after the operation ended, Le Duan went to Moscow where he stayed 43 days, arguing successfully for Soviet support of Hanoi's own plans for its offensive. As with previous offensives launched against a militarily superior force, the

*\*The communique of this crucial Plenum picked up Le Duan's formula on "the three revolutions" in the North ("the technical revolution is the main one")—the first known instance a collectively approved Central Committee document used this slogan. This, and other signs, indicated that Le Duan was in firm control at the Plenum.*

aim of the Easter 1972 offensive was as much psychological as military. The purpose was to break ARVN'S resolve to keep fighting and to induce a demoralized Saigon government to negotiate an end to the war on Communist terms, namely, to accept a coalition government dominated by Communists. It was the same fight-to-compel-negotiations strategy Le Duan had pursued, with only partial success, in the big offensives of 1968 and early 1969.

When the 1972 offensive lost momentum in September 1972, Moscow and Peking concerned that the war was interfering with their separate efforts to develop a detente relationship with the US urged Hanoi to come to terms with the Saigon government. As a result, the collective Politburo made political concessions it had been unwilling to consider at the time the offensive was first planned—a time when the Vietnam war was still politically backed by Peking. Le Duan, as party leader, must have approved the final cease-fire arrangements, but some Vietnamese leaders reportedly opposed any new concessions. The vacillation in Hanoi between October 1972 and January 1973 over signing the agreement suggests that Le Duan had difficulty getting the support of the Politburo for the concessions.

Hanoi Radio went out of its way immediately after the signing of the cease-fire agreement to describe Le Duan in an exceptionally effusive way, apparently to scotch any thought that his authority was in jeopardy. In reporting on a celebration of Tet 1973 attended by Le Duan, Truong Chinh, and others, Hanoi Radio said that those who attended "together with Comrade Truong Chinh wished...Comrade Le Duan good health so that he may lead the party and state in achieving ever greater victories."\* The account not only put Truong Chinh in his place, but, more important, showed that Le Duan dominated direction of the state as well as the party—an unusual situation inasmuch as Le Duan holds no important position in the state apparatus.

Despite this expression of public confidence in Le Duan, his endorsement of concessions almost certainly strained Politburo unity, for it implied that Hanoi was willing to admit the possibility that the division of Vietnam

*\*A year later, during Tet 1974 festivities, Hanoi Radio again gave Le Duan unusually adulatory attention, reporting that a group of people to whom he paid a Tet visit greeted him as "venerated and beloved Uncle Le Duan." This kind of accolade hitherto had been reserved for Ho Chi Minh.*

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into two countries would be perpetuated. This prospect was anathema to die-hards in the leadership, and Le Duan himself probably was unhappy about it. One positive note from his point of view was the opportunity the cease-fire gave him to push economic development and modernization in the North. This had long been a subject dear to his heart, and Le Duan wasted no time announcing plans for postwar development.\* A prominent feature was a comprehensive plan to reshape the party at all levels, possibly including the Central Committee, in a mold of his own choosing. A Politburo Resolution—on which Le Duan published a lengthy exegesis—was issued in February 1973. It set out guidelines for changing the Party apparatus so that it would be better prepared to direct the economic and technical revolution that Le Duan envisaged in the “new era” ahead. One basic precept was that tired old revolutionaries should be replaced by vigorous managerial and technically oriented people. Le Duan had argued before, notably in his February 1970 article, that personnel changes were overdue. Numerous articles touching on aspects of this theme and quoting one or both of the 1970 and 1973 Le Duan articles appeared in North Vietnamese media after February 1973.

The North Vietnamese media also bolstered Le Duan's position relative to his colleagues by rewriting an early period of party history so as to give him, rather than Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh, major credit for setting the line on “armed struggle” that was followed in the three decades since 1940. A series of articles played up the importance of the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee, convened in November 1939 near Saigon, and attended by Le Duan and a few other leaders (now all dead). The articles, published in the autumn of 1972, asserted that the 6th Plenum, rather than the 8th Plenum attended by Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh in 1941, set the party on its wartime course. Hitherto, party histories had invariably treated the 8th Plenum as the “historic” occasion when the party firmly embarked on its revolutionary course.

#### The Status of Truong Chinh

In past years, when Le Duan gained political strength, Truong Chinh tended to fade into the background, and vice versa. This pattern has held true since August 1970.

*\*Progress on this front has been slow, probably because of the persistence of uncertainties in the military situation. These uncertainties have strengthened VWP elements opposed to making a wholesale shift to a peace-time footing until political prospects in the South look better.*

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Truong Chinh has ceased to be identified with major policies, either those actually adopted or those espoused by the regime. His 1968 speech his last important contribution to policy has not been mentioned in the Hanoi press since August 1970. Chinh did make one long speech in December 1971 at a Vietnam Fatherland Front meeting, but it does not appear to have been a major one. Although it was mainly a pep talk designed to rally popular and international support for the new phase of the war the Communists were about to initiate, Truong Chinh made his first capitulation on the "Red and expert" issue, acknowledging that the aim of socialism in the North was "to achieve the three revolutions of which the technical revolution is the key."

An early sign that Truong Chinh's position in the power structure was insecure was his absence from public view from October 26, 1970 to January 26, 1971. This was unusual for Truong Chinh; his ceremonial posts require him to carry a heavy schedule of public speaking, receiving foreign delegations, and so forth. Truong Chinh may have been abroad for medical attention during at least part of his absence; on January 11, 1971, the East German radio made a brief and unusual announcement that Chinh was there taking a rest cure. In any case, it appears that Truong Chinh missed the crucial 19th Plenum, which is reliably reported to have been held in December 1970. (Hanoi held up announcement of the plenum until February 2, 1971; such announcements are often not made for a month or more after the event.) Another Politburo member who apparently missed the plenum was Chinese specialist Hoang Van Hoan, a long-time associate of Truong Chinh. Hoan, who was traveling in Europe in the autumn of 1970, did not return to Hanoi until December 30, 1970. Whatever the precise facts of their whereabouts and the timing of the Plenum, Hanoi apparently was willing to give the impression that the presence of these two Politburo members was not necessary at key leadership deliberations.

Shortly after the Easter 1972 offensive began, Truong Chinh told a visiting Scandinavian ambassador that "events have passed me by." This remark was interpreted in the diplomatic community to mean that his views on the offensive had been ignored.

Truong Chinh continued to make frequent routine public appearances during the rest of 1972 and 1973. He made one trip abroad, to Moscow in December 1972, but the highest ranking official he met was Suslov, an influential party secretary but not one of the "troika." Occasionally Chinh is still quoted in the media, but not on really major matters. In general, Truong Chinh's activities and speeches show that his post-1970 role has been to serve the propaganda purposes of the regime, not to initiate or influence policy.

### Le Duan's Strengths

In the competitive atmosphere that characterizes high-level politics in Communist regimes such as North Vietnam, it takes strong and astute men to survive at the top. Le Duan, although lacking the oracular authority of Ho Chi Minh, seems to have the necessary strength to survive. He has:

- the mantle of Ho Chi Minh's approval;
- a long tenure at or near the top;
- solid qualities of intellect and leadership, which seem to command respect and loyalty in the VWP apparatus;
- an unblemished party record, unlike some of his colleagues;
- enough proteges and allies in the power structure to give him majority support.

How and when Le Duan earned Ho Chi Minh's esteem is something of a mystery. According to party history, the two did not meet until after World War II. Even then, for the 12 years that Le Duan was party boss in the South their personal contacts were limited to Le Duan's infrequent visits to Ho Chi Minh's headquarters in the North. Le Duan must have made a good impression, for when the first postwar Central Committee was formed in 1951, he was given the number-three position, immediately below Secretary General Truong Chinh, [REDACTED]

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In 1957, Ho Chi Minh, disenchanted with Truong Chinh's disastrous handling of land reform and wishing to develop a more aggressive policy toward the South, summoned Le Duan north and gave him his first postwar job at the national level. It could not have been easy going for Le Duan at first. Although listed ahead of the now demoted Truong Chinh in protocol appearances, Le Duan was not given a formal title to enhance his status and, moreover, had to spend much of his time in the South preparing the apparatus for the new war effort. (The new course did not get fully launched until 1960.) While Le Duan was diverted to this task, Truong Chinh was able to make a strong comeback. In 1958 and 1959, Chinh again became regime spokesman on land reform and sharply criticized "rightists" and "revisionists" in the areas of ideology and culture. Chinh apparently retained a seat on the Secretariat and was named (over General Giap, for one) senior vice premier, a position that automatically made him acting premier when Pham Van Dong was out of the country or ailing.

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Such signs of preferment ended abruptly for Truong Chinh in September 1960 at a party congress held, in part, to confirm Le Duan as First Secretary. Chinh was dropped from the executive side of government and from the Secretariat in a reshuffle that left him chairman of the legislature, a prestige job carrying no responsibility. He did, however, retain his number-three spot on the Politburo.

Le Duan, now formally chief party executive, gave the major political report at the congress, while Truong Chinh gave only a minor report on ideology. By conferring the title "First Secretary" on Le Duan, Ho Chi Minh showed that he had reached a firm decision to groom Duan to succeed him as party leader; in 1960 "First Secretary" was the title held by party bosses in most Communist states. In reserving the rarefied position of Party Chairman for himself, Ho Chi Minh was only following Mao Tse-tung's special example, and Ho probably intended to let the position lapse on his death. In fact, [REDACTED] a secret provision to this effect was appended to the 1960 party statutes.

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Although Le Duan now held the title of First Secretary, he was still little known among party officials. Steps, almost certainly approved by Ho Chi Minh, were therefore taken to enhance Le Duan's party prestige. His works were quoted more than those of any leader except Ho, and the party press gave rave reviews to some of Le Duan's books, a practice not usually accorded anyone else except Ho. For example, a book by Le Duan on the peasant problem (Truong Chinh's long-time specialty) was praised in the January 26, 1965 *Nhan Dan* as a "great work" and an "important contribution to the revolutionary dialectic." The review took special note of Le Duan's leadership qualifications by observing that he had participated in the "leadership" of the party since its inception, had done extensive work in all three regions of Vietnam, and had successfully applied basic Communist principles to actual conditions in Vietnam.

Again, the June 1969 issue of *Hoc Tap* described a book by Le Duan on the economy as "a valuable theoretical and practical book on developing the socialist economy in North Vietnam." By asserting that Le Duan's precepts are "practical" as well as "theoretical," the reviewer seemed to be pointing up the limitations of Truong Chinh, who is known chiefly as a theoretician and whose famous 1968 speech was praised only for making a "theoretical" contribution.

Le Duan acquired more than just the trappings of power in 1960. Ho Chi Minh allowed him to name his men to key positions and gave him a virtually free hand in determining policy toward the South. In personnel matters, for example, besides edging Truong Chinh away from center stage,

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Le Duan was able to place two colleagues from the South (Pham Hung and Le Duc Tho) on both the Politburo and the Secretariat.

Captured documents and prisoner reports make it clear that most of the time Le Duan has been the architect of North Vietnam's war policy. At the first major COSVN conference held in early 1966 after the US entered the ground war, the VWP representative said he was speaking on behalf of Le Duan; the major report presented was a letter written by Le Duan; and the COSVN commander expressed satisfaction that, in Hanoi, his conduct of the war had the full support of "Comrade Secretary," meaning Le Duan. Ho Chi Minh's name came up only in a general propaganda context. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reporting on leadership arguments over the war, said that "Ho Chi Minh tended to equivocate but left everything to Le Duan"—probably an accurate statement at that time.

By the time Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, Le Duan had had years of opportunity to use the party's formidable resources for indoctrination—secret party documents and political lectures as well as public media—to his advantage. He was able both to enhance his own stature and also subtly to weaken the political standing of potential rivals. The cumulative effect of his skillful indoctrination was revealed in interrogations of several politically sophisticated prisoners after September 1969. Asked to assess the relative standings of top leaders, their consensus was that Le Duan had enough control in the VWP to succeed Ho. They said that Truong Chinh was better known and commanded respect, but could never regain the prestige lost after the land reform failures; General Giap, they said, was just a military man; and only Premier Dong had enough political strength to offer competition to Le Duan.

[REDACTED] gave the following rundown of Le Duan's political assets at the time [REDACTED]

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"Le Duan is extremely skillful, is trusted by the party and respected by the people. Furthermore, he has the reputation of being a close follower of Ho. It had been generally understood and accepted among the North Vietnamese people that when Ho died, Le Duan would assume the leadership role. Le Duan is recognized as being the most "perfect" member of the VWP. He is the highest ranking party member to have taken direct part in the struggle in South Vietnam, having been active in the South against the French."

Such statements faithfully repeated the theme of indoctrination material issued since 1960. Le Duan was considered "perfect" simply because

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political reports that he had made a mistake or incurred Ho's displeasure were never allowed to circulate. By contrast, political officers reportedly have freely referred to Truong Chinh's tendency to be inflexible and too pro-Chinese, and both General Giap and Premier Dong came under criticism early in the war for counseling caution when Ho Chi Minh (and Le Duan) wanted to enlarge the North's war commitment.

### Le Duan's Weaknesses

Although Le Duan's political assets are formidable, there are some liabilities in his position.

As already noted, he has less than a charismatic personality and must therefore work harder, and perhaps make more compromises than Ho Chi Minh in order to retain control. His basic policies have prevailed in the past two years, indicating that he has the majority of the power structure with him, and probably commands personal loyalty from men like Le Duc Tho who owe their rise to Le Duan. The evidence also suggests, however, that he must contend with a certain amount of stubborn opposition.

The opposition at present apparently lies mainly on Le Duan's left flank, where he seems to be vulnerable as a result of the political concessions he made to reach the cease-fire agreement. The evidence tenuously suggests that opposition is centered in the army and the southern Communist apparatus.

The result presumably is a divided Politburo, over which Le Duan presides with something less than unquestioned authority.

One would expect a leader with Le Duan's experience to be doing more to surround himself with able, loyal subordinates. The top party organizations--the Politburo and the Central Committee--are all of 1960 vintage and were largely created by Ho Chi Minh. Le Duan's failure to rearrange the leadership in a mold more to his liking may be another sign of weakness.

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## V. Structure of the Present Leadership and the Outlook

The leadership structure of the VWP has been very stable over the past 15 years. People have tended to be frozen in jobs because of wartime requirements and there has been little upward mobility.

Most Politburo members are in their mid-60s, well below the age of retirement or senility in communist countries and a decade younger than their Chinese counterparts. Le Duan was 66 on April 7, 1973. The oldest (and least influential) member is the 69-year-old former ambassador to China, Hoang Van Hoan. The inner circle of six senior Politburo members are all first-generation revolutionaries who rose to prominence in the ICP of the 1930s.

Second-level leaders can be neatly stratified on the basis of when they first made their mark on party history. The older group is composed of men who came to the fore in the war against the French. They include 25 generals, men who now hold key command and staff positions. Some probably will be transferred to civilian tasks to meet the need for executive talent as extensive postwar reconstruction programs get under way. Civilians in this category include two members of the Secretariat: Hoang Anh and To Huu. Both are candidates for a future Politburo. Anh is the regime's top agricultural specialist, and To Huu is responsible for propaganda and education and possibly also for science and technology.

A younger group of men, so-called "new blood," is composed mostly of economic managers who have risen to key positions since the mid-1950s. Prominent men in this list include Nguyen Con, a Secretariat member who also apparently serves as executive deputy to Premier Pham Van Dong, who is in frail health; Nguyen Lam, Chairman of the State Planning Commission; Tran Quang Huy, deputy head of the party's Science and Education Department; and Tran Quynh, reportedly Le Duan's personal secretary, who also has responsibilities in the area of science and technology. Con and Lam are clearly Politburo material. Do Muoi, who was named minister of a reorganized and enlarged Ministry of Building in June 1973, is an important senior economic manager.

A change in the leadership is long overdue. The list of men who look like "comers" is sparse, and the Central Committee—last formed nearly 14 years ago—is full of deadwood. Less than half the 41 full members of the Central Committee appear to meet Le Duan's criteria for men he wants to have around him. In March 1973 he wrote that "general leadership" cadres should be youthful or at least vigorous, loyal to the top leader (himself), and

competent to manage major economic and technical developmental projects. Rumors circulate from time to time in Hanoi that a 4th Party Congress will be held to revitalize the leadership and mark the changeover from a war to a peace footing. They have not yet been confirmed, but the long-delayed congress may be held in the coming year.

When a 4th Party Congress finally is convened, some diplomats in Hanoi expect to see an "explosion" in the leadership ranks. Presumably, Le Duan, if still in the saddle, would try to strengthen his position as much as politically feasible. The outcome could be less than an "explosion," however, for Le Duan has shown considerable prudence in the past when moving against political adversaries. Assuming he retained control of VWP, he might settle for a few crucial selections of loyal, competent men for the Politburo and Secretariat. Le Duan might not even try to purge his old opponent Truong Chinh, but agree to a compromise that left Chinh on the Politburo, while reserving for himself the right to pick his own number-two man. In this case, he would probably choose Le Duc Tho, who seems to be Duan's closest associate on the Politburo.

Barring the unexpected, there will continue to be two influential bodies of opinion in the VWP. One, centered in the military and the southern apparatus, will argue for the return to a higher level of military activity (a big offensive or perhaps guerrilla warfare). The other, the group headed by Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, though not entirely unsympathetic to the aims of the first group, will take a more moderate position.

Stabilizing factors are also at work. Hanoi media continue to make frequent references to a "new era" of "peaceful struggle," and Le Duan, Premier Dong, and some other leaders want very much to get on with the job of "building socialism" in the North. Le Duan, who has dominated policy toward the South under a variety of conditions during the past 28 years, has acquiesced before (1955-57 and 1961-62) in a static situation when the North seemed to feel it had nothing to gain by intensifying the war. Moreover, China and the USSR both want to see the conflict dampened, to let the political yeast ferment and count on time being on the Communists' side. Their advice has adherents in the Hanoi Politburo, but it is probably not decisive. A "political action" strategy is in fact the course being followed now. It was adopted after the cease-fire and reaffirmed by the Central Committee at its 21st Plenum which was held toward the end of 1973.

The strategy has forced the Politburo to make difficult compromises. Le Duan has joined with the Politburo in a major effort to maintain a large North Vietnamese fighting force in the South. Although the immediate mission of this force is defensive, it is large enough with relatively little

reinforcement to allow the Politburo to keep open the option of renewing the military offensive. There may be strains in the North Vietnamese leadership over just how much more effort should be put into support of the South and how much into construction of the North.

Such strains could get worse if the present strategy fails to produce results in the South, and especially if reconstruction in the North lags as well. A continued failure to make substantial progress toward both goals could make the next few years a period of serious challenge to Le Duan's leadership.



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## ANNEX

### The Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party

The following are capsule biographies of members of the VWP Central Committee and of selected other key officials. Each sketch gives (1) present position or role, (2) first prominent party role, and (3) politically favorable or adverse aspects of his background.

Each person is judged according to the criteria published by Le Duan in March 1973 stating that high-level cadre should be:

- loyal to their superior (i.e., Le Duan);
- competent and experienced managers;
- vigorous and in good health;
- practical men who produce results.

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## THE VWP CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Capitalized name - Politburo member

Underlined name - Secretariat member

\* - holdover from the previous (pre-1960) Central Committee

† - meets Le Duan's criteria for leadership (loyalty, vigor, and competence)

### FULL MEMBERS

†Hoang Anh Member, Secretariat; Vice-Premier (April 1971); Chairman, Central Agricultural Commission (April 1971); Politburo material.

Held key military administrative posts in the 1950s and economic jobs after 1959. Currently the regime's agricultural specialist.

**Major General Le Quang Ba** Chairman, National Minorities Board, a ceremonial post.

A distinguished montagnard who commanded the 316th Division of montagnards at Dien Bien Phu. Born 1907. His presence on the central committee is probably honorary.

\***Nguyen Luong Bang** Vice President of the DRV, a figurehead position.

Born in 1904, a founding member of the ICP, but no recent important jobs. A prestigious party elder.

**Duong Quoc Chinh** Minister of Interior (1971), an unimportant post.

In the DRV the Interior Ministry has the lowly job of handling social welfare. Chinh was first noted July 1960 when he was identified as Minister of Water Conservancy and Electric Power. His subsequent decline suggests that he failed to measure up as an economic manager.

\***TRUONG CHINH** Number two on the Politburo; Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly and Vice Chairman of the Vietnam Fatherland Front.

See Figure 1, page 24 for details of his career and his rivalry with Le Duan.

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†**Nguyen Con**—Member, Secretariat; Vice Premier; member, Standing Committee of the Council of Ministers (June 1973); and member, National Defense Council (June 1971); Politburo material.

Before June 1973 Nguyen Con was Chairman of the State Planning Commission—a Politburo-level responsibility. Several reports have stated that he was a rising figure. The first reference to him was a January 1957 report saying that he was a member of a land reform committee. His transfer to the Council of Ministers in June 1973 may mean that he now directly assists the often ailing Premier Dong.

†**Major General Le Quang Dao**—Deputy Director, General Political Department (May 1956); commander, Lao war front in 1971. Named alternate member of the 3rd central committee in 1960, he has been regularly identified as a full member since March 1973. A prominent and politically important general.

\***PHAM VAN DONG**—Premier of the DRV since 1955; third ranking member of the Politburo; older than Le Duan and in frail health.

Born 1906, Dong was a member of Ho Chi Minh's "Revolutionary Youth" in the 1920s, and studied in Canton under Ho Chi Minh. From 1936 to 1939, Dong was in Hanoi, along with Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap writing for Front publications. He attended the 8th Plenum in 1941 but, curiously, was not named to the Central Committee until 1949.

He demonstrated skill as a negotiator in dealing with the French in 1946 and 1954. Reportedly held dovish views early in the 1960s, but gave wholehearted support to the war after 1965. He has ably negotiated with Peking and Moscow for support. He appears to be in good standing with Le Duan.

**Vo Thuc Dong**—Ambassador to USSR (January 1972); one of the least prominent Central Committee members.

Was Party Secretary of Nghe An Province before 1972 and has held other regional posts. Dong is higher ranking than his predecessor, an alternate member, and the DRV Ambassador to Peking, also an alternate Central Committee member. Dong's assignment nicely reflects Hanoi's desire to show some warming (but not too much) in relations with Moscow vis-a-vis Peking.

† \***LE DUAN**—VWP First Secretary; member, National Defense Council (June 1971), his only government position.

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See Figure 1, page 24 for a sketch of Le Duan's career.

†**Tran Huu Duc** Minister at the Premier's Office (April 1965); member, National Defense Council (June 1971); a senior economic manager.

Born 1904, but still active and vigorous. Began his revolutionary career in 1929. Has held many planning and economic jobs since 1954, and is obviously held in high regard by Premier Dong and Le Duan.

†**Colonel General VAN TIEN DUNG** Army Chief of Staff since 1954; close to Le Duan; younger and less prestigious than Giap, but political standing may be higher.

Dung fought with the Viet Minh in World War II and commanded the 320th Division after 1950. Though not at Dien Bien Phu, he apparently impressed Ho Chi Minh, for in 1954 Dung was named Chief of Staff. He then went South to serve under Le Duan for two years. According to interrogation reports, Ho Chi Minh, in his last years, praised Dung for being more aggressive than Giap. According to a captured *Nhan Dan* reporter, Dung publishes under the pseudonym Chien Thang, author of important, predictably hawkish statements on military policy in 1972 and 1973. The youngest member of the Politburo (born 1917), Dung may be slated to replace Giap, who has been inexplicably absent from public view much of the time in the past year.

\***Ha Huy Giap** Vice Minister of Culture (January 1963).

A veteran Communist whose career goes back to the 1930s, Giap writes theoretical articles, often travels as a representative of the VWP. He does not seem to carry much political weight though. He was reported to have come under criticism in 1967 for opposing the war.

\***Senior General VO NGUYEN GIAP** Minister of Defense, victorious commander at Dien Bien Phu, and author of "People's Army, People's War." Giap is probably the VWP leader best known outside Vietnam. He has been commander in chief of the VPA since its formation on December 22, 1944. Giap probably devised the military strategy used in the big offensives of 1968-69 and 1972.

Giap has quarreled with other Politburo members. His record of rivalry with Truong Ching goes back to 1950. According to interrogation reports, Giap, in opposition to both Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan, was against sending

NVA troops south in 1964. Although Giap is the fifth-ranking member of the Politburo, his name was sixth on the list of those attending Ho Chi Minh's funeral, Le Duc Tho (normally number six) having been placed ahead of Giap. The downgrading of Giap's Politburo standing at that important ceremony is consistent with recurrent reports that Giap, though respected for his generalship, has little say in Politburo decisions. Illness probably accounts for his periods of absence from public view—especially prolonged in the past year—but he could be in political trouble.

† **Lieutenant General Song Hao**—Director, VPA General Political Department (March 1961), making him the army's top political commissar; Deputy Secretary, Party Military Affairs Committee; Vice Minister of National Defense (March 1961).

Song Hao got his job of Director, GPD, after a struggle for power in 1960-61 between Senior General Giap and the then GPD head, Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh. The major public issue was army professionalism vs. party primacy. Giap won that round, Thanh was retired to rural work, and the rank of GPD chief was reduced two steps, from Senior to Lieutenant General.

Song Hao's subsequent career has been uneventful, suggesting that he is a career officer accepted by and responsive to the professionals who dominate the VPA today.

\***HOANG VAN HOAN**—Chinese specialist, and probably the least influential member of the Politburo; Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee, a prestige position.

Born 1905, Hoan had an illustrious early party career, culminating in the 1950s with appointments to the Politburo, the military high command, and concurrently Ambassador to China (1950-57). Apparently a casualty of Ho Chi Minh's 1957 decision to become more independent of China, Hoan has since then never been given a really important assignment, although he was retained on the 1960 Politburo as its most junior member. He now spends much of each year visiting other Communist countries, but is not known to be entrusted with important negotiating missions; he may, however, play a useful liaison role with the Chinese.

† \***TRAN QUOC HOAN**—Minister of Public Security since 1953.

Tran Quoc Hoan was probably born about 1910. His long tenure as Minister of Public Security has given him an opportunity he undoubtedly has used to build an independent power base.

In addition to running the large, conventional police apparatus in North Vietnam, as Minister of Public Security (MPS) he directs the People's Armed Security Forces, the DRV militia organization. Tran Quoc Hoan's public appearances and speeches give the impression that he is a powerful member of the Politburo. Although Le Duan probably would prefer to have his own man in the MPS post, there have been no reports of friction between the two men. A hint that Le Duan intends to tighten control over the management of the MPS appeared in Politburo Resolution 225 of February 1973. The resolution entrusted the Organization Department (headed by Le Duc Tho) with the broad task of selecting party cadres and singled out cadres directing security work for special attention, saying that they "must necessarily be selected with care."

† \*PHAM HUNG Chief, COSVN, since 1968; member, Secretariat; a Le Duan protege.

Pham Hung, who was born 1912 in Vinh Long Province, is the only southerner in the Politburo. His career through the mid-1950s paralleled those of Le Duan and Le Duc Tho. All three were in jail during World War II, and remained South after the war and after the DRV was established in 1954. After Le Duan returned North in 1957, Pham Hung's rise was rapid. He was named to the Politburo in 1957, and was given a series of agricultural and economic assignments. He became senior Vice Premier in 1960, served as Acting Premier in Premier Dong's absence, and apparently was being groomed to succeed him. At the end of 1967, however, it became necessary to send him South to replace the recently deceased COSVN chief, General Nguyen Chi Thanh.

After that, Pham Hung dropped from public view. [REDACTED] report has confirmed that he remained Secretary of COSVN through 1973. The last reported statement he made was in 1969, when he endorsed COSVN Resolution 9 justifying the retreat from the big offensive strategy. His apparent recent silence is puzzling, inasmuch as one would expect the Communists to use the authority of Pham Hung's name (he is number four on the Politburo) to add weight to political indoctrination material. Instead, all reported speeches exhorting cadres in the South to implement cease-fire policies have come from other leaders of COSVN or from representatives of the VWP sent from Hanoi. The absence of statements from Pham Hung raises the possibility that he does not fully support the "political action" line COSVN has been ordered to take.

‡ \*To Huu Member, Secretariat and head of the Central Committee departments responsible for propaganda, education, and possibly science and technology; an authoritative spokesman for the VWP.

To Huu, who was born in 1920, joined the ICP in the 1930s and made a name for himself as a poet and propagandist. He toured South Vietnam in the spring of 1973, explaining the VWP party line on the Paris agreement (only "political action" was authorized except in self-defense) and reassuring cadres on Le Duan's policy on retiring old cadres (don't worry about it; the policy will be gently applied in the South).

**\*Nguyen Khang**—No known positions. Apparently retired.

A veteran Communist, Khang is one of several Central Committee members who, after a promising start, have lost stature for no readily apparent reason.

Khang held key posts with the Viet Minh, was Ambassador to China from April 1957 to April 1959, and then held fairly important posts in the Office of the Premier from 1960 to 1965. Khang is the only known Catholic in the Central Committee.

**Ung Van Khiem**—Retired, in political disfavor.

Khiem is an old revolutionary who became a casualty of the "anti-revisionist" witch-hunts of the mid-1960s. For eight years after 1946 he commanded Viet Minh forces in the South. On his return North, he rose to become the VWP's leading foreign affairs specialist. In 1961-63, the peak of his career, he was concurrently Minister of Foreign Affairs and chairman of the VWP Foreign Affairs Department. Then, according to several reports, he came under attack for being a leading member of a "pro-Soviet" group of revisionists. He was reassigned in April 1963 to the Ministry of Interior, where his responsibilities consisted of dispensing social welfare. He lost that job in June 1971, and as far as is known now holds no position.

**\*Nguyen Van Kinh**—Retired and under a political cloud, though still President of the Vietnam-Soviet Friendship Association.

Under the pseudonym of Thuong Vu, Kinh served in South Vietnam from 1951 to 1957. Then he was named Ambassador to Moscow, probably with instructions to argue that Hanoi was determined to use violence if necessary to take over the South. At some point, however, Kinh may have been persuaded by persistent Soviet arguments to play down violence, because in February 1967 he was recalled and retired from active party and government work. [REDACTED] has reported that in 1967 Kinh was accused of being "revisionist" and "pro-Soviet."

†**Nguyen Lam** Chairman, State Planning Commission (June 1973); Politburo material.

The first reference to him was in 1953, when he was identified as a tax official. Has stayed in economic work, rising gradually to his present crucial position, a Politburo-level job.

\***Le Van Luong** Nominally a member of the Secretariat, but holds no other positions and apparently never recovered influence lost because of mistakes during the 1956 land reform.

An old revolutionary. Le Van Luong was removed in disgrace from the Politburo and government positions in the fall of 1956. Although kept on the Secretariat, he has had no specific job assignment since then.

†**Major General Tran Luong**—A deputy commander at COSVN.

Tran Luong was one of the first commanders of COSVN, which was formed in 1961, and stayed on as deputy when higher ranking generals came South to direct the enlarging war.

†**Major General Le Hien Mai** - Senior Deputy Director, General Political Directorate.

Served as a military commander in the South under Le Duan from 1950 to 1954. Mai writes frequently on political work in the army.

†**Major General Chu Huy Man** Political officer, B-3 Front (Western highlands) since 1970; Deputy Director, VPA General Political Department.

One of the few representatives of tribal minorities entrusted with real responsibility. Man was Political Officer of the 316th Division at Dien Bien Phu. In 1963-66 he was Political Officer of Military Region-5, which then included the Western highlands. In 1966 he was named both Commander and Political Officer of the just-created B-3 Front, positions he held until 1970, when he turned over purely military command responsibilities to another VPA General (Hoang Minh Thao).

†**Do Muoi** A senior economic manager; Minister of Building, June 1973, when it was created by merging several construction-related ministries; Vice Premier (December 1969).

Do Muoi is a veteran Communist who, with the exception of 1961-67 when he was inactive for unknown reasons, has held economic jobs of increasing importance since 1956.



† **\*LE THANH NGHI**—Vice Premier and Politburo economic specialist.

A founding member of the ICP, Le Thanh Nghi worked with the Viet Minh in the North during the war against the French. Has held several economic and industrial positions since 1956. He is also one of the Politburo's principal aid negotiators with Peking and Moscow. He published a long article in *Nhan Dan* in June 1973, which followed the Le Duan line on rational handling of management problems and reliance on "economic levers."

† **Major General Tran Van Quang**—Vice Minister of National Defense; Deputy Chief of Staff; and member, Military Affairs Committee of the VWP Central Committee. Identified for the first time as a member of the Central Committee in the newspaper *Hanoi Moi* on January 26, 1974. He may have been an alternate member of the 1960 Central Committee and have been recently promoted to full membership to fill one of the three vacancies created by deaths since 1960.

Major General Quang was the first commander of COSVN, when it was established in 1961. In the late 1960s he served as commander of DRV Military Region 4 (southern North Vietnam).

**Mrs. Ha Thi Que**—Vice President, Vietnam Women's Union.

**\*Colonel General Chu Van Tan**—Vice Chairman, Standing Committee of the National Assembly's Minorities Commission, both ceremonial positions.

Chu Van Tan, a montagnard, led Viet Minh guerrillas in World War II. His present high positions were given as a reward for that service.

**\*Bui Quang Tao**—Has held economic posts, but current position unknown.

Tao was Minister of Construction from 1958 until June 1973 when he was reassigned to "other duties." These have not yet been specified, though he continues to make occasional public appearances, identified only as a member of the Central Committee. The failure to give him a title commensurate with his party rank suggests that his political importance has declined.

† **Lieutenant General Hoang Van Thai**—Commander, South Vietnam Liberation Army (COSVN) since 1967; Vice Minister of Defense; Deputy Chief of Staff.

One of the few generals prominent in the ICP in the 1930s, Thai was Giap's chief of staff at Dien Bien Phu. He was commander of MR-5,

1963-67, and was reassigned to command forces under COSVN in 1967. Thai, like his patron General Giap, was an enthusiastic supporter of the big offensives strategy in 1968-69, and presumably also in 1972. Born in 1906, he is probably the oldest general on active duty.

† **Le Quoc Thanh** Chief of Hanoi police since 1955 and Vice Minister of Public Security since 1958. Other than that he is the senior Vice Minister, putting him in line to succeed Tran Quoc Hoan, little is known about Le Quoc Thanh.

\***Ton Duc Thang** President of the DRV, a figurehead position.

Born 1888, Thang is the hero of the legendary Black Sea incident. (In 1919 he took part in a Communist-inspired mutiny on a French vessel). That is his chief claim to fame.

\***Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thap** Chairman, Vietnam Women's Union.

† **\*LE DUC THO** Member, Secretariat; Director, Organization Department of the Central Committee; the DRV's chief negotiator at Paris since 1968. Although ranked sixth on the Politburo, Tho appears to be Le Duan's closest associate.

A founding member of the ICP, Le Duc Tho was named to the Central Committee in 1945, and has since been something of a protege of Le Duan. Tho served as Le Duan's deputy in the South in the 1950s. In 1960, Tho was named to the Secretariat under Le Duan, and given the crucial post of chief of the VWP Organization Department. At the 3rd Party Congress, Le Duc Tho gave the second most important speech, on party organization. (Le Duan gave the principal report).

About that time, a rumor began circulating of frictions between Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, an allegation that has often been repeated by Western observers of the North Vietnamese political scene. The story originated in the emigre community in France, and has never been substantiated by evidence from Vietnam.

In February 1973 the Politburo issued a resolution spelling out criteria for selecting cadres and reorganizing the government and party in the "new era" of postwar construction. Le Duc Tho's Organization Department was assigned the task of implementing the resolution, and Le Duan published a lengthy report endorsing the resolution.

At the Paris talks, Le Duc Tho has demonstrated considerable skill and diplomacy. The talks have made him one of the best known Vietnamese leaders outside Vietnam.

**\*Xuan Thuy**—Chief of the DRV Delegation to the Paris peace talks, since they began in May 1968. Member, Secretariat, and head of the Central Committee's Foreign Relations department. He is evidently held in high regard by the Politburo as an international expert. Thuy's chief problem is chronic ill health.

Born in 1912 and an ICP veteran. Before 1968 his specialty was maintaining liaison with international Communist organizations. He was Foreign Minister from 1963 to 1965, but resigned for health reasons. He was often too ill in Paris to attend meetings.

† **\*Nguyen Van Tran**—Member, Secretariat; Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee since 1968, and publicly very active in this role. Politburo material.

Tran used to hold key military industrial jobs. He was Minister of Heavy Industry, 1960 to 1967, and concurrently on the Military Affairs Commission and the National Defense Council. He dropped all these posts when he took the equally important post of Hanoi Secretary. Born in 1916, he is one of the younger members of the power structure.

**\*NGUYEN DUY TRINH**—Vice Premier since 1960 and DRV Foreign Minister since 1965, but does not seem to carry much weight. Really important negotiations are handled by others on the Politburo.

A founding member of the ICP, Trinh was the regime's leading economic specialist in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but his career appears to have peaked then. In 1957 he was the regime's leading land reform specialist and was named to the Politburo the same year. He was named head of the State Planning Commission the following year and led major trade delegations abroad. In 1963, in addition to his other duties, he became chairman of the State Scientific and Technological Commission. All these jobs were dropped in 1965 when he became Foreign Minister, a job that in itself carries relatively little responsibility in the DRV. In the absence of evidence that he has ever been in political trouble, his decline may simply reflect dissatisfaction of the Politburo with his work.

† **\*Major General Phan Trong Tue**—Minister of Communications and Transport (1960), a key post in Vietnam. Still fairly young (born 1917), Tue was in the ICP, served under Le Duan as a commander in the South 1945-54, and in 1959-60 was commander, Public Security Armed Forces and a Deputy Minister of Public Security. He left these posts in 1960 to give full attention to the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

**\*Hoang Quoc Viet** Viet became tainted with the domestic policy errors of 1956, was dropped from the Politburo, and now holds only figurehead positions. He is a leading member, Vietnam Fatherland Front; chairman, Vietnam Federation of Trade Unions; and chairman, Vietnam-China Friendship Association.

#### ALTERNATE MEMBERS

**†Ly Ban** Vice Minister of Foreign Trade (1958).

Active in arranging trade agreements with Communist allies, especially Peking, which he has visited numerous times. He is of Chinese-Vietnamese descent, and his oldest child is reported to have been educated in China.

**†Major General Nguyen Thanh Binh** Minister of Water Conservancy (June 1973), a key job in the flood-prone DRV.

Deputy chief of army logistics, 1957-60. Has held economic jobs since then.

**Mrs. Dinh Thi Can** Vice Minister of Health (July 1960).

**Nguyen Tho Chan** Apparently retired, though still young (born 1922); could be in disfavor; last position, Ambassador to Moscow from March 1967 to December 1971.

An official in the Ministry of Labor from 1955 to 1959, Chan was promoted to the job of First Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee in 1960, when he was elected alternate member of the Central Committee. In 1962 he was demoted to a provincial post, which he held until his March 1967 assignment to Moscow. He was the first DRV ambassador to Moscow who was not a full member of the Central Committee; his assignment evidently was intended to show displeasure with Moscow for refusing to support the Vietnam war politically.

**†Major General Tran Do** Deputy Political Officer, South Vietnam Liberation Army (COSVN), since about 1963. Tran Do commanded the 312th Division at Dien Bien Phu. He is one of several senior NVA generals assigned more or less permanently to COSVN. Publishes under the pseudonym Cuu Long.

**†Major General Nguyen Don** Vice Minister of Defense (July 1967); Deputy Chief of Staff (about 1969). A prominent general with experience in the South.

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Held command positions in Interzone 5 (now MR-5) during the Viet Minh war, commanded MR-4 (southern North Vietnam) 1955-60, and returned to MR-5 as Commander and Secretary about 1962. Between then and 1967 transferred to COSVN to serve as a Deputy Commander. In July 1967, he was reassigned to Hanoi, as part of a command reshuffle in preparation for the Tet 1968 offensive.

†**Major General Tran Quy Hai**—Vice Minister of Defense (February 1961) and Deputy Chief of Staff (December 1963). Important general with command experience in the South.

Hai was chief, General Directorate for Rear Services from 1961 to 1963; a Vice Chairman of the State Planning Commission in 1965; and served a tour in the South about 1967, as Commander of the Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region.

†**Le Hoang**—Secretary, Bac Thai Province Party Committee (1965) and possibly concurrently manager of the Thai Nguyen Steel Works in Bac Thai, North Vietnam's largest heavy industrial enterprise, which was being rebuilt in 1973.

In the late 1950s Hoang was deputy head of the Thai Nguyen construction project, and in 1961 was named Director of the Material Resources Directorate. He has a strong party economic background.

†**Tran Quang Huy**—Minister for Culture and Education; deputy head of the Science and Education Department of the Central Committee since 1970; Chief Editor of *Hoc Tap* since 1961.

Comparatively young (born 1922), Huy holds politically significant positions, is publicly active, and is probably slated for full membership in the Central Committee. Huy's immediate superior in all his positions is Secretary To Huu, who appears to exercise Politburo-level responsibilities.

†**Nguyen Khai**—Vice Chairman of the party's Organization Department.

Little is known about Khai, but he holds a politically important position.

†**Nguyen Huu Khieu**—Minister of Labor (October 1965).

Khieu headed the party's Agricultural Department from 1963 to 1965. Little is known of his background; apparently he is a reliable party bureaucrat.

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†**Hoang Van Kieu** Secretary, Tay Bac Zonal Party Committee.

†**Le Liem** Vice Minister of Education (October 1965).

A former political commissar in the army (he was deputy chief of the army's General Political Department from 1953 to 1958). He serves under a non-party minister and is probably the *de facto* director.

**Ngo Minh Loan** Member, Central Agricultural Commission with ministerial rank (April 1967).

Loan has held a series of minor economic posts and one diplomatic assignment Ambassador to Peking, April 1967-December 1969. Hanoi was especially angry at Peking in April 1967 (in May 1967 *Hoc Tap* published a polemical attack on Mao Tse-tung's leadership style), and probably selected Loan to go to Peking because he was only a minor party official.

†**Nguyen Van Loc** Vice Chairman, Central Agricultural Commission (April 1971). Has held important agricultural posts since 1958.

†**Nguyen Huu Mai** Chairman, Industry Department of the Central Committee (1964); Minister of Coal and Electric Power (1969).

Has held economic posts of increasing importance since 1950; he is probably slated for promotion to full membership in the Central Committee.

**Ha Ke Tan** Demoted from Minister of Water Conservancy to director of the Ta River dam project in June 1973.

A major general in the VPA and prominent in the Viet Minh war. Ha Ke Tan directed flood control work from 1958 to 1973. A *Nhan Dan* article in June 1973 on flood damage control criticized leadership in the field, implying dissatisfaction with Ha Ke Tan's work.

†**Le Thanh** Chairman, Agriculture Department of the Central Committee since 1966.

The first reference to Thanh, in January 1957, identified him as a member of a land reform group. Little else is known about him.

†**Major General Dinh Duc Thien** Chief, VPA General Directorate of Rear Services since 1966; Minister of Machinery and Metallurgy (October 1970).

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In addition to his weighty duties as chief of army logistics and of North Vietnam's heavy industry, Thien is nominally director of the big Thai Nguyen Steel Works. He is reported to be the brother of Le Duc Tho. (Hanoi Radio has referred to him on occasion as Le Duc Thien).

**Ngo Thuyen**—Ambassador to China since January 1970.

In rural work 1954-56, when many party officials were tainted by errors committed during land reform. Then assigned to Thanh Hoa Province, perhaps a mild form of exile, where he stayed until going to Peking. If he is actually under a political cloud in Hanoi, as his background suggests, this would make him the least influential envoy ever sent to Peking.

**\*Nguyen Khanh Toan**—Vice Minister of Education (January 1963).

Educated in the USSR, a professor and linguist, and the architect of the DRV educational system, Toan is one of the VWP's best known intellectuals. His political importance, once considerable, has declined in recent years, as is evident from his drop in Central Committee rank from full to alternate member in 1960. Since he is 71 years old, it is not likely that he will make a comeback.

**†Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra**—Commander or 1st Deputy Commander, COSVN, since about 1963; achieved international prominence in February-March 1973 as PRG representative to the Four Party Joint Military Commission in Saigon.

Tra joined the ICP in 1940, held several command positions in the South under Le Duan from 1946 to 1954, and then reportedly went to the USSR and China for further military training.

Was promoted to Lieutenant General in 1962, just before receiving his assignment to command COSVN. When the war expanded and more senior generals were sent South, Tra stayed on as 1st Deputy Commander.

During 1973, Hanoi Radio treated Tra as a hero and chief military spokesman for the South, suggesting he was being groomed to replace his superior, the 68-year-old COSVN Commander Lieutenant General Hoan Van Thai. Tra is 56, and clearly slated for larger responsibilities.

**Bui Cong Trung**—No current position; a veteran communist who dropped from public view after being criticized in 1967 for opposing the war.

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†**Hoang Tung** Chief editor of *Nhan Dan*.

Tung has edited Communist journals since Viet Minh days. He is readily accessible for interviews with non-Communist newsmen and other foreigners, who report that he is outspoken and has an open manner.

†**Tran Danh Tuyen** Minister of Materials (December 1969) and a trade union official.

Joined the ICP in 1937. Has held several economic and industrial jobs. Although not prominent, Tuyen appears to be a trusted, senior industrial manager.

†**Major General Nguyen Trong Vinh** Apparently has responsibilities regarding Laos.

General Vinh, with Le Duan, received a Laotian delegation in Hanoi in 1972, and was a member of a delegation to Laos November 2-6, 1973. These were the first references to this obscure general since a 1960 identification of him as Commander, DRV Military Region-4 (southern North Vietnam).

†**Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Vinh** Chairman of the Reunification Commissions of both the party and the government; Deputy Chief of Staff and Vice Minister of Defense since 1959.

Lieutenant General Vinh has been closely associated with Le Duan most of his career. He served under Le Duan in the South from 1946 to 1954, and in 1960 became head of the two Reunification Commissions, created to help direct the insurgency in the South. Captured documents suggest that Vinh served throughout the war as Le Duan's executive officer on policy toward the South. Vinh has attended and reported at a number of COSVN conferences, stating on one occasion that he spoke on behalf of Le Duan.

#### IMPORTANT PARTY OFFICIALS NOT ON THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The following are believed to be persons holding responsibilities that qualify them for membership on the Central Committee. They include all seven generals in the VPA not now on the Central Committee and one civilian, Tran Quynh, reported to be Le Duan's personal secretary.

†**Major General Le Quang Hoa** Deputy Chief, VPA, General Political Department; joint head of the February-March 1973 DRV Commission to

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Saigon (the other head was alternate member of the Central Committee, Major General Nguyen Don).

†Major General Pham Ngoc Mau—Deputy Director, GPD (May 1961).

†Tran Quynh—Deputy Chairman, State Commission for Science and Technology; head, sub-committee for Foreign Cooperation and Technology.

Signed a science and technology cooperation agreement with East Germany in November 1973. He is reported by a knowledgeable prisoner to be Le Duan's personal secretary and slated to be on the next Central Committee.

†Major General Tran Sam—Vice Minister of Defense; he handles virtually all negotiating for military aid.

†Major General Le Truong Tam—A deputy commander at COSVN since 1963; concurrently Deputy Chief of Staff.

†Major General Hoang Minh Thao—Commander, B-3 Front (Western highlands) since 1970; Deputy Director, VPA General Political Department.

Thao commanded the 304th Division at Dien Bien Phu.

†Major General Hoang Anh Tuan—Head of the PRG military delegation to the Two Party Joint Military Commission in Saigon.

†Major General Vuong Thua Vu—Deputy Chief of Staff (1955); Deputy Chief of the General Directorate of Rear Services (1970); published articles on strategy during the war, including one of the "polemical articles" of 1966.

Commander of the 312th Division at Dien Bien Phu.

INDEX OF NAMES

Name	Category	Name	Category
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Le Quang Ba	f	Tran Luong	f
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Nguyen Thanh Binh	a	Chu Huy Man	f
Dinh Thi Can	a	Pham Ngoc Mau	o
Nguyen Tho Chan	a	Do Muoi	f
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Le Liem	a	Nguyen Trong Vinh	a
Ngo Minh Loan	a	Nguyen Van Vinh	a
Nguyen Van Loc	a	Vuong Thua Vu	o

*f - Full member, VWP Central Committee*

*a - Alternate member, VWP Central Committee*

*o - Other*

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